I Want to Repent, But ...

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Introduction

Praise be to Allaah, we praise Him and seek His help. Whomever Allaah guides cannot be led astray, and whomever He leaves astray, cannot be guided. I bear witness that there is no god except Allaah alone, with no partner or associate, and that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger.

Allaah has commanded all the believers to repent, as He says (interpretation of the meaning): *"… And all of you beg Allaah to forgive you all, O believers, that you may be successful." [al-Noor 24:31]*

People may be divided into two types, those who repent and turn to Allaah, and those who do wrong; there is no third category. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): *"… And whosoever does not repent, then such are indeed zaalimoon (wrong-doers, etc.)." [al-Hujuraat 49:11]*. We are living in a time when many people have strayed far from the religion of Allah, and sin and immorality have become so widespread that there is no one who remains free from the taint of evil except for the one who is protected by Allaah.

However, Allaah will not allow but that His light should be perfected, thus many people have awoken from the slumber of negligence. They have become aware of their failure to fulfil their duties towards Allaah, have regretted their carelessness and sin, and so have started to move towards the beacon of repentance. Others have grown weary of this wretched life of misery, and so they are looking for a way out of darkness and into the Light.

But these people face many obstacles which they think stand between them and repentance, some of which exist within their own selves, and others in the world around them.

For this reason I have written this brief work, hoping to clear up this confusion, dispel doubts, explain wisdom and drive away the Shaytaan.

Following an introduction which discusses the dangers of taking sin lightly, I then explain the conditions of repentance, psychological cures, and *fataawa* (rulings) based on evidence from the Qur'aan and Sunnah which are addressed to those who repent. This is followed by quotations from some of the scholars' comments, and my own concluding remarks.

I ask Allaah to benefit me and my Muslim brothers through these words. I ask no more from my brothers than that they should pray for me and offer me sincere advice (*naseehah*). May Allaah accept the repentance of us all.

The danger of taking sin lightly

You should know, may Allaah have mercy on me and on you, that Allaah has commanded His slaves to repent sincerely and has made doing so obligatory. He says (interpretation of the meaning): *"O you who believe! Turn to Allaah with sincere repentance…" [al-Tahreem 66:8]*.

Allaah has given us time to repent before the honourable scribes (*kiraaman kaatibeen* – recording angels) record our deeds. The Prophet (peace and blessings of

Allaah be upon him) said: "The (scribe) on the left hand raises his pen (i.e., delays writing) for six hours [this may refer to six hours of 60 minutes as measured by astronomers, or it may refer to short periods of time during the day or night – *Lisaan al-'Arab*] before he records the sinful deed of a Muslim. If he regrets it and seeks Allaah's forgiveness, the deed is not recorded, otherwise it is recorded as one deed." (Reported by al-Tabaraani in *al-Kabeer* and al-Bayhaqi in *Shu'ab al-Eemaan* (The Branches of Faith); classed as *hasan* by al-Albaani in *Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth al-Saheehah*, 1209). A further respite is granted after the deed has been recorded, up until the moment before death approaches.

The problem is that many people nowadays do not place their hope and fear in Allaah. They disobey Him by committing all manner of sins, day and night. There are those who are being tested by the idea of regarding sins as insignificant, so you may see one of them regarding certain "minor sins" (*saghaa'ir*) as inconsequential, so he might say, "What harm can it possibly do if I look at or shake hands with a (non-mahram) woman?" They think nothing of looking at women in magazines and on TV shows. Some of them, when they are told that this is haraam, may even facetiously ask, "So how bad can it be? Is it a major sin (*kabeerah*) or a minor sin (*sagheerah*)?" Compare this attitude with that reflected in the following reports narrated by Imaam al-Bukhaari (may Allaah have mercy on him):

Anas (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "You do things which in your eyes are less significant than a hair, but at the time of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), we used to count them as things that could destroy a man."

Ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "The believer regards his sin as if he were sitting beneath a mountain which he fears may fall on him, whereas the sinner regards his sin as if a fly lands on his nose and he swipes it away."

Will these people then understand the seriousness of the matter when they read the following hadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)? "Beware of the minor sins which are often thought of as insignificant, for they are like a group of people who stopped in the bottom of a valley. One of them brought a stick, and another brought a stick, until they had gathered enough to cook their food. These minor sins, if a person is called to account for them, will destroy him." According to another report, he said: "Beware of minor sins, for they will pile up until they destroy a person." (Reported by Ahmad; *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 2686-2687).

The scholars said that when minor sins are accompanied by a lack of shame or remorse, and with no fear of Allaah, and are taken lightly, then there is the risk that they will be counted as major sins. Hence it is said that no minor sin is minor if you persist, and no major sin is major if you keep on seeking forgiveness.

So we say to the one who is in this situation: Do not think about whether the sin is major or minor; think about the One Whom you are disobeying.

In sha Allah, these words will benefit those who are sincere, and who are aware of their sins and shortcomings, and do not insist upon doing wrong and adhering to their faults.

These words are for those who believe in the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): *"Declare (O Muhammad) unto My slaves, that truly, I am the oft-Forgiving, the Most-Merciful." [al-Hijr 15:49]* and in His words *"And that My Torment is indeed the most painful torment." [al-Hijr 15:50]*. It is essential to keep this balanced view in mind.

Conditions for the acceptance of repentance

The word *tawbah* ("repentance") conveys a profound meaning, one which carries great implications. It is not, as many people think, the matter of mere lip-service, after uttering which a person may then continue in his sin. If you ponder the meaning of the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): *"... Seek the forgiveness of your Lord, and turn to Him in repentance..." [Hood 11:3]*, you will see that repentance is something which is over and above seeking for forgiveness.

Such a great and important matter must necessarily have conditions attached to it. The scholars have described the conditions of repentance, based on the Qur'aan and Sunnah. They include:

Immediate cessation of the sin.

Regret for what is past

Determination not to return to the sin

Restitution of victims' rights, or seeking their forgiveness

Some scholars have also mentioned more details as conditions of sincere repentance, which we quote below with some examples:

1. That the sin should be given up only for the sake of Allaah, not for any other reason, such as being unable to do it, or being afraid of what people will say.

The person who gives up his sin because of its negative impact on his reputation and standing among people, or on his work, cannot be described as one who repents.

The person who gives up his sin for reasons of health and strength, such as one who gives up promiscuity and immorality because he is afraid of contagious killer diseases, or because it weakens his body and his memory, cannot be described as one who repents.

The person who refuses to accept a bribe because he fears that the person offering it may be from the law enforcement agency, operating under cover, cannot be described as one who repents.

The one who does not drink wine or take drugs just because he does not have the money with which to buy them cannot be described as one who repents.

The one who does not commit a sin because of reasons beyond his control cannot be described as one who repents. So the liar who is robbed of the power of speech, the adulterer who becomes impotent, the thief who loses his limbs in an accident… all of them must feel remorse for what they have done and give up any wish to do it again. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Remorse is repentance." (Reported by Ahmad and Ibn Maajah; *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 6802).

In the sight of Allaah, the one who is incapable of committing a deed but has the desire to do it is the same as one who does do it. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "There are only four kinds of people in this world. (The first is) a slave whom Allaah has blessed with wealth and knowledge, and he fears Allaah with regard to them, and uses them to uphold family ties, and acknowledges the rights that Allaah has over them. He has the highest status. (The second is) a slave to whom Allah has given knowledge, but not wealth. His intention is sincere, and he says, 'If only I had wealth, I would do (good deeds) like so-and-so (the first slave).' He will be rewarded according to his intention, so their reward will be equal. (The third is) a slave to whom Allaah has given wealth, but not knowledge. He spends his money aimlessly, neither fearing Allaah with regard to it nor using it to uphold family ties nor acknowledging the rights that Allaah has over it. He has the lowest status. (The fourth is) a slave to whom Allaah has given neither wealth nor money. He says, 'If only I had wealth, I would do (bad deeds) like so-and-so (the third slave). He will be punished according to his intention, so their burden of sin will be equal." (Reported by Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi, and classed as saheeh in *Al-Targheeb wa'l-Tarheeb*, 1/9).

2. The one who repents should feel that his sin is repulsive and harmful. This means that if a person repents sincerely, he cannot derive any feelings of pleasure or enjoyment when he remembers his past sins, or wish to repeat them in the future. In his books *Al-Daa' wa'l-Dawaa'* and *al-Fawaa'id*, Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) mentions many of the harmful effects of sin, including the following:

Loss of knowledge – feelings of alienation in the heart – difficulty in all one's affairs – physical weakness – loss of the desire to obey Allaah – absence of blessing – lack of success by the help of Allaah (*tawfeeq*) – tightness in the chest, i.e., unhappiness – generation of evil deeds – habituation to sin – disgrace in the sight of Allaah – disgrace in the sight of people – the curse of the animals – the dress of shame – sealing of the heart and being included in the curse of Allaah – not having *du'aa's* answered – corruption on land and on sea – lack of self-respect or honour – loss of a sense of shame – loss of blessings – incurring the wrath of Allaah – feelings of alarm and dismay in the heart of the sinner – falling into the clutches of Shaytaan – an unhappy end – the punishment of the Hereafter.

This description of the harmful consequences of sin would make anyone want to keep away from sin altogether, but some people no sooner give up one kind of sin but they fall prey to another kind, for numerous reasons, including the following:

They think the new sin is less serious

They have a greater inclination towards it, and their desire for it is stronger

Because circumstances are more conducive to this sin than others, which may require more effort; the means of committing it are readily available and widespread

His friends are all committing this sin, and it is too hard for him to separate himself from them

Because the sin is a means of gaining status among his companions, and he is not willing to give up his status, so he continues in his sin. This is what happens to some of those who are in positions of what may be described as gang leadership. Such a thing happened to the shameless poet Abu Nawaas, when (another poet) Abu'l-'Ataahiyah sought to advise him concerning some of his sins. Abu Nawaas responded:

"Do you see me, O 'Ataahi, giving up these amusements,

Do you see me losing my status among my people for a life of piety?"

The slave should hasten to repent, because delay is in itself a sin for which repentance is required.

He should have the fear that his repentance may have been lacking in some way, and he should not assume that it has been accepted, so he cannot remain complacent or feel secure against the Plan of Allaah.

He should make up for duties that he has neglected in the past, such as payment of zakaat which he withheld in the past – because it is due to Allaah and it is the right of the poor – and so on.

He should avoid the place where the sin was committed if his presence there will lead to him committing the same sin again.

He should shun those who helped him to commit the sin.

(The above is taken from *Fawaa'id hadeeth qaatil al-mi'ah* (what we can learn from the hadeeth about the one who killed a hundred people), which we will quote below).

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): *"Friends on that Day will be foes one to another, except al-muttaqoon (the pious)." [al-Zukhruf 43:67]*

Bad friends will curse one another on the Day of Judgement, which is why when you repent, you should keep away from them, shun them, and warn others about them if

they do not respond to your da'wah and advice. You should not let Shaytaan tempt you to go back to them on the grounds that you want to advise them, especially when you know yourself to be weak and unable to resist this temptation. There are many cases of people falling back into sin because they went back to the company of bad friends.

He should destroy the haraam things in his possession, such as alcoholic drinks, musical instruments (like *'ood* – a stringed instrument - and *mizmaar* – a wind instrument), haraam pictures and films, worthless literature and statues. They should be broken, destroyed and burnt. This getting rid of all the trappings of *jaahiliyyah* at the point of turning over a new leaf is absolutely essential. How often has the keeping of such things been the cause of their owners reneging on their repentance and going astray after having been guided! May Allaah help us to remain steadfast.

He should choose righteous friends who will help him, instead of those bad friends. He should strive to attend gatherings where Allaah is remembered and where he may gain more knowledge. He should fill his time with worthwhile pursuits so that Shaytaan will not find ways to remind him of the past.

He should rebuild his body which has been fed on unlawful things, by obeying Allaah and striving to nourish it with only lawful things, so that it will become strong.

He should repent before the death-rattle appears in his throat (i.e., before death is imminent), and before the sun rises in the West [one of the major Signs of the Day of Judgement], as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever repents before the death rattle reaches his throat, Allaah will accept it from him" (reported by Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi, *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 6132) and "Whoever repents before the sun rises in the West, Allaah will accept his repentance" (reported by Muslim).

Great acts of repentance

Here we will look at examples of repentance among the early generation of this ummah, the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him):

Buraydah (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that Maa'iz ibn Maalik al-Aslami came to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: "O Messenger of Allaah, I have wronged myself by committing adultery, and I want you to purify me." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned him away. The next day, he came back and said: "O Messenger of Allaah, I have committed adultery," and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned him away a second time. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) sent for his people and asked them, "Do you know of anything wrong with him mentally? Have you ever noticed any strange behaviour on his part?" They said, "What we know is that he is of sound mind. He is among the righteous people, as far as we can see." Maa'iz came back a third time, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) sent for his people too, and they told him that there was nothing

wrong with him or with his mind. On the fourth day, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) had a hole dug for him, and commanded that he should be stoned. The Ghaamidi woman came and said, "O Messenger of Allaah, I have committed adultery, so purify me." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned her away. The next day, she came back and asked, "Why are you turning me away? Perhaps you are turning me away as you turned Maa'iz away, but by Allaah I am pregnant." He said, "Then no (I will not carry out the punishment). Go away until you have given birth." When she had given birth, she brought the child wrapped in a cloth and said, "Here, I have given birth to him." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Go away and breastfeed him until he is weaned." When she had weaned him, she brought the child, holding a piece of bread in his hand, and said: "O Messenger of Allaah, here he is, I have weaned him and he is eating solid food now." The child was given to one of the Muslims to take care of, then the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) ordered that a chest-deep hole be dug for her, and that she be stoned. Khaalid ibn al-Waleed picked up a stone and threw it at her head. Blood spurted out onto his face and he swore at her. The Prophet of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) heard what he said, and told him: "Take it easy, O Khaalid! By Him in Whose hand is my soul, she has repented in such a way that if the tax-gatherer had done so, he would have been forgiven." (Reported by Muslim). Then he gave orders that the (funeral) prayer should be offered for her, and she was buried.

According to one report, 'Umar said: "O Messenger of Allaah, you had her stoned and now you will pray for her!" He said: "She has repented in such a way that if it were to be shared out among seventy people of Madeenah, it would be sufficient for them. Can you find anyone better than one who gives up her soul for the sake of Allaah?" (Reported by 'Abd al-Razzaaq in *al-Musannaf*, 7/325).

Repentance wipes out whatever came before it

One might say: "I want to repent, but who can guarantee that Allaah will forgive me if I do so? I want to follow the Straight Path, but I feel very hesitant. If I knew for sure that Allaah would forgive me, I would definitely repent."

I would say in response that these feelings of hesitation are the same as those experienced by the Sahaabah themselves. If you think seriously about the following two reports, the feelings you have will be dispelled, in sha Allaah.

Imaam Muslim (may Allaah have mercy on him) reported the story of how 'Amr ibn al-'Aas (may Allaah be pleased with him) came to Islam: "…When Allaah put the love of Islam into my heart, I came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: 'Stretch forth your hand so that I may give *bay'ah* (pledge of allegiance) to you. He stretched forth his hand, but I pulled my own hand back. He asked, 'What is the matter, O 'Amr?' I said, 'There is a condition.' He asked, 'What is the condition?' I said: 'That I be forgiven.' He said: 'Do you not know, O 'Amr, that

Islam wipes out whatever came before, hijrah (migration for the sake of Allah) wipes out whatever came before, and Hajj wipes out whatever came before?'"

Imaam Muslim reported from Ibn 'Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with them both) that some people among the mushrikeen killed, and killed a great deal, and they committed adultery, and did it a great deal. Then they came to Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: "What you say and advocate is good, if only you could tell us that there is any expiation for what we have done." Then Allaah revealed the words (interpretation of the meanings): *"And those who invoke not any other god along with Allaah, nor kill such life as Allaah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse – and whoever does this shall receive the punishment." [al-Furqaan 25:68]; "Say: 'O My slaves who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allaah…" [al-Zumar 39:53]*.

Will Allaah forgive me?

You might say: "I want to repent, but my sins are many indeed. There is no kind of immoral act, no kind of sin, imaginable or otherwise, that I have not committed. It is so bad that I do not know if Allaah can forgive me for the things that I have done over the years."

In response, I would tell you that this is not a unique problem; it is one that is shared by many of those who wish to repent. Let me give you the example of a young man who asked this question once. He began his career of sin at a very early age, and by the time he was only seventeen, he already had a long record of committing every kind of immoral act, major and minor, with all kinds of people, old and young alike. He had even abused a little girl. Added to this was a long list of thefts. Then he said: "I have repented to Allaah. I now pray tahajjud some nights, and I fast every Monday and Thursday, and I read Qur'aan after Fajr prayers. Will my repentance be of any avail?"

The guiding principle for us Muslims is to refer to the Qur'aan and Sunnah when we look for rulings, solutions and remedies. When we refer this matter to the Qur'aan, we find that Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): *"Say: 'O My slaves who have transgressed against themselves (by committing evil deeds and sins)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allaah, verily Allaah forgives all sins. Truly, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. And turn in repentance and in obedience with true faith to your Lord and submit to Him…" [al-Zumar 39:53-54]*.

This is the answer to this particular problem. The matter is quite clear and needs no further explanation.

The feeling that one's sins are too great to be forgiven by Allaah stems from a number of factors:

The absence of certain faith on the part of the slave in the vastness of Allaah's mercy

A lack of faith in the ability of Allaah to forgive all sins

Weakness in one aspect of the heart's action, namely hope

Failure to understand the effect of repentance in wiping out sins

We will answer all these points here:

It is sufficient to quote the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): *"… and My Mercy embraces all things…" [al-A'raaf 7:156]*

It is sufficient to quote the saheeh hadeeth qudsi: "Allaah says: "Whoever knows that I am able to forgive all sins, I shall forgive him, and I shall not mind, so long as he does not associate anything with Me.'" (Reported by al-Tabaraani in *al-Kabeer*, and by al-Haakim; *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 4330). This refers to when the slave meets his Lord in the Hereafter.

This may be remedied by referring to the hadeeth qudsi: " 'O son of Adam, so long as you call upon Me and put your hope in Me, I will forgive you for what you have done, and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, if your sins were to reach the clouds of the sky, and you were to ask me for forgiveness, I will forgive you and I shall not mind. O son of Adam, if you were to come to Me with sins nearly the size of the earth, and you were to meet Me not associating anything with Me, then I would bring you forgiveness nearly the size of (the earth).'" (Reported by al-Tirmidhi; *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 4338).

It is sufficient to quote the hadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "The one who repents from his sin is like the one who did not sin in the first place." (Reported by Ibn Maajah; *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 3008).

For those who find it hard to comprehend how Allaah may forgive such an accumulation of sin, we quote the following hadeeth:

The repentance of one who killed a hundred

Abu Sa'eed Sa'd ibn Maalik ibn Sinaan al-Khudri (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "There was among the people who came before you a man who killed ninety-nine people. Then he asked about the most knowledgeable person on earth, and was directed to a hermit, so he went to him, told him that he had killed ninety-nine people, and asked if he could be forgiven. The hermit said, 'No,' so he killed him, thus completing one hundred. Then he asked about the most knowledgeable person on earth and was directed to a scholar. He told him that he had killed one hundred people, and asked whether he

could be forgiven. The scholar said, 'Yes, what could possibly come between you and repentance? Go to such-and-such a town, for in it there are people who worship Allaah. Go and worship with them, and do not go back to your own town, for it is a bad place." So the man set off, but when he was halfway there, the angel of death came to him, and the angels of mercy and the angels of wrath began to argue over him. The angels of mercy said: 'He had repented and was seeking Allaah.' The angels of wrath said: 'He never did any good thing.' An angel in human form came to them, and they asked him to decide the matter. He said: 'Measure the distance between the two lands (his home town and the town he was headed for), and whichever of the two he is closest to is the one to which he belongs.' So they measured the distance, and found that he was closer to the town for which he had been headed, so the angels of mercy took him." (Agreed upon). According to a report in *al-Saheeh*: "The righteous town was a hand-span closer, so he was counted as one of its people." According to another report in *al-Saheeh*: "Allaah commanded (the evil town) to move away, and (the righteous town) to move closer, and said: 'Measure the distance between them,' and they found him to be a hand-span closer to the righteous town, so he was forgiven."

What then can come between a person and repentance? Do you think that your sins are any greater than the sins of this man, whose repentance Allaah accepted? So why despair? The matter is even greater than this. Think about the words of Allaah (interpretation of the meaning): *"And those who invoke not any other god along with Allaah, nor kill such life as Allaah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse – and whoever does this shall receive the punishment. The torment shall be doubled to him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein in disgrace; except those who repent and believe, and do righteous deeds; for those, Allaah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allaah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." [al-Furqaan 25:68-70]*.

Stop and think about that phrase: *"... Allaah will change their sins into good deeds..." [al-Furqaan 25:70]*. This will explain to you the immense grace and favour of Allaah. The scholars have defined this change as being of two types:

Changing bad characteristics into good ones, so that *shirk* is changed into true faith, fornication into chastity, lies into truthfulness, treachery into trustworthiness, etc.

Changing evil deeds that one has committed into good deeds on the Day of Resurrection. Think about the words *"...Allaah will change their sins into good deeds..."*. It does not say that one bad deed will be exchanged for a good deed (of equal weight). It could be less, the same, or more, in number or in weight. It will depend on the sincerity of the one who repents. Can you imagine any greater favour than this? See how this divine generosity is further explained in the following hadeeth:

'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Jubayr reported from Abu Taweel Shatb al-Mamdood that he came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) [another report states that a very old man whose eyebrows had fallen over his eyes (i.e., he had sunken eyes) came and stood before the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)

supporting himself with a stick] and said: "What do you think of a man who has committed every sin, not leaving out any sin, major or minor [according to another report: if his sins were to be divided among all the people of the world, they would destroy them]. Can such a man repent?" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) asked, "Have you become Muslim?" He said: "I bear witness that there is no god except Allaah and that you are the messenger of Allaah." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Do good deeds and keep away from evil deeds, and Allaah will turn them all into good deeds for you." He asked, "What about my acts of treachery and immorality?" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Yes, (those too)." The man said, "*Allaahu akbar* (Allaah is most great)!" and kept glorifying Allaah until he was out of sight.

(Al-Haythami said: a similar version was reported by al-Tabaraani and al-Bazzaar. The men of al-Bazzaar's *isnaad* are the men of *saheeh* apart from Muhammad ibn Haaroon Abi Nasheetah, who is *thiqah*. *Al-Majma'* 1/36. Al-Mundhiri said in *al-Targheeb*: its *isnaad* is *jayyid qawiy*, 4/113. Ibn Hajar said in *al-Isaabah* 4/149 that it meets the conditions of *saheeh*.)

At this point the one who is seeking to repent may ask: "When I was astray and not even praying, which meant I was beyond the pale of Islam, I did do some good deeds. Will I be rewarded for these deeds after I repent, or are they lost in the wind?"

The answer to this question may be found in the following hadeeth: 'Urwah ibn al-Zubayr reported that Hakeem ibn Hizaam told him that he said to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "O Messenger of Allaah, do you think that I will be rewarded for the (good) things like giving charity, freeing slaves and upholding family ties that I did during the Jaahiliyyah (days of ignorance before Islam)?" The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "You became Muslim because of the good that you had already done." (Reported by al-Bukhaari).

These sins will be forgiven, these evil deeds will be turned into good deeds, and these good deeds that were done during the days of jaahiliyyah will still count in your favour after you repent. What more could anyone possibly want?

What should I do when I have sinned?

You might ask: "If I commit a sin, how can I repent from it straightaway? Is there anything that I should do straight after committing a sin?"

The answer is that there are two things which should be done after committing a sin. The first is to feel remorse in one's heart and to be determined not to repeat the sin. This is the result of fearing Allaah. The second is to undertake some physical action to do different kinds of good deeds, such as praying *salaat al-tawbah* (the prayer of repentance). Abu Bakrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "I heard the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) say: 'There is no man who

commits a sin, then gets up, purifies himself, prays two rak'ahs then asks Allaah to forgive him, but Allaah will forgive him.'" (Reported by the authors of *Sunan*; see *Saheeh al-Tagheeb wa'l-Tarheeb*, 1/284). Then he recited this aayah (interpretation of the meaning): *"And those who, when they have committed faahishah (illegal sexual intercourse, etc.) or wronged themselves with evil, remember Allaah and ask forgiveness for their sins; - and none can forgive sins but Allaah – and do not persist in what (wrong) they have done, while they know." [Aal 'Imraan 3:135]*

Other saheeh reports describe how to perform the two rak'ahs which will expiate for sin. In summary:

He should perform wudoo'. "There is no-one who performs wudoo' and performs it well, but his sins will fall from the washed limbs with the water or with the last drop of water."

He should do wudoo' well. Doing wudoo' well includes saying "Bismillaah" at the beginning, and reciting some du'aa's afterwards, such as *"Ash-hadu an laa ilaaha ill-Allaah wahdahu laa shareeka lah, wa ash-hadu anna Muhammadan 'abduhu wa rasooluhu"* or "*Allaahumma'j'alni min al-tawwaabeen wa'j'alni min al-mutahhareen* (O Allaah, make me one of those who repent and make me one of those who are purified)" or "*Subhaanak Allaahumma wa bi hamdika ash-hadu an laa ilaaha illa anta, astaghfiruka wa atoobu ilayk* (Glory and praise be to you O Allah. I bear witness that there is no god but You. I seek Your forgiveness and I repent to You)." Saying any of these du'aa's after wudoo' will bring a great reward.

He should stand and offer two rak'ahs of prayer.

He should not make any mistakes or forget any part of the prayer.

He should not let his thoughts wander.

He should concentrate properly and think of Allaah whilst praying.

Then he should seek the forgiveness of Allaah.

The result will be that his previous sins will be forgiven, and he will be assured of Paradise. (*Saheeh al-Targheeb*, 1/94,95)

This should be followed with more good deeds and acts of obedience to Allaah. When 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) realized that he had made the mistake of disagreeing with the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) during the Campaign of al-Hudaybiyah, he said: "Because of that I did many deeds," i.e., righteous deeds, as expiation for that sin.

Think about the example given in the following saheeh hadeeth:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The one who does bad deeds then does good deeds is like a man who wears a tight coat of mail which almost chokes him; when he does a good deed, it becomes a little looser, and as he does more good deeds it becomes even looser, until it falls off him and drops to the ground." (Reported by al-Tabaraani in *al-Kabeer*; see also *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 2192).

So good deeds release the sinner from the prison of disobedience, and bring him forth into the brave new world of obedience to Allaah.

Ibn Mas'ood said: "A man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and said: 'O Messenger of Allaah, I found a woman in a garden and I did everything with her (kissing and fondling) except that (intercourse), so do with me as you will.' The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not say anything, and the man went away. 'Umar said: 'Allaah covered his sin. He should have covered it himself.' The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) followed the man with his gaze and said: 'Bring him back to me.' So they brought him back, and (the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) recited to him: *'And perform al-salaah (prayer) at the two ends of the day and in some hours of the night. Verily, the good deeds remove the evil deeds (i.e., small sins). That is a reminder for the mindful (those who accept advice)' [Hood 11:114 – interpretation of the meaning]*." According to the report narrated by 'Umar, Mu'aadh said: "O Messenger of Allaah, is this just for him or does it apply to all the people?" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "No, it applies to all the people." (Reported by Muslim)

Evil people pursue me

You might say, "I want to repent, but evil friends are pursuing me wherever I go. As soon as they learn of any change I have made, they launch an attack against me, and I feel too weak to resist them. What can I do?"

Our answer is: bear this with patience, for this is how Allaah tests His sincere slaves, so that He may distinguish the truthful from the liars, the good from the evil.

As you have taken the first step on the Straight Path, stand firm and persevere. These people are the devils of men and jinn, who will conspire with one another to turn you away from this path. Pay no heed to them. At the beginning, they will tell you that this is just a passing fancy, a temporary crisis that will not last. Strangely enough, such people have been known to say of friends who were setting out on the road of repentance, "What evil he has fallen into!"

One of these evil people, when her former boyfriend put the phone down on her because he had repented and wanted nothing more to do with this sin, called him back a few days later to say, "Maybe the evil insinuations have stopped now!"

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Say: I seek refuge with (Allaah) the Lord of mankind,

The King of mankind,

The ilaah (God) of mankind,

From the evil of the whisperer (devil who whispers evil in the hearts of men) who withdraws (from his whispering in one's heart after one remembers Allaah),

Who whispers in the breasts of mankind,

Of jinns and men."

[al-Naas 114:1-6]

Is your Lord more deserving of obedience, or these people who call to evil?

You should know that they will pursue you wherever you go and will use every means at their disposal to try to bring you back to the way of sin. One young man told me that he had had a girlfriend who, after he repented, used to tell her driver to follow him, and she would call to him from the window of her car whilst he was on his way to the mosque!

But Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Allaah will keep firm those who believe, with the word that stands firm in this world (i.e., they will keep on worshipping Allaah alone and none else) and in the Hereafter." [Ibraaheem 14:27]

They will try to remind you of the past and make your past sins appear attractive, by means of reminders, earnest pleas, pictures, letters… Do not pay any attention to them. Be on your guard against the ways in which they will try to tempt you. Remember the story of Ka'b ibn Maalik, one of the great Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) commanded all his Companions to cut off ties with Ka'b because he had stayed behind and had not joined the expedition to Tabook. This boycott was to last until Allaah decided concerning him. The kaafir king of Ghassaan sent a letter to Ka'b, in which he said: "We hear that your master has treated you badly. Allaah has not put you in a house of humiliation and loss, so come to us and we will provide for you." The kaafir wanted to win over the Muslim so that he would leave Madeenah and be lost in the land of kufr. How did this great Sahaabi react to this? Ka'b said: "When I read it, I said, 'This is also a test,' and I threw it in the oven and burned it."

This is how the Muslim, male or female, should deal with everything that is sent by bad people: burn it to ashes, and whilst you are burning it, remember the Fire of Hell.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"So be patient. Verily, the Promise of Allaah is true, and let not those who have no certainty of faith, discourage you from conveying Allaah's message" [al-Room 30:60]

They threaten me

You may say: "I want to repent but my old friends are threatening to reveal my past and publish my secrets to everyone. They have pictures and other papers they can use against me. I am worried about my reputation, and I am scared!"

Our advice is: fight back against these friends of Shaytaan. The tricks of Shaytaan are weak, and all the pressure that the helpers of Iblees may bring against you will soon crumble in the face of the patience and perseverance of the true believer.

You should realize that if you try to placate them, this will only give them more evidence to use against you, and you will be the loser sooner or later. Do not pay any heed to them, ask Allaah to help you to deal with them and say: "*Hasbi Allaah wa ni'm al-wakeel* (Allaah is Sufficient for me and He is the Best Disposer of affairs)." When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was afraid of a people, he would say: "*Allaahumma innaa naj'aluka fi nuhoorihim wa na'oodhu bika min shuroorihim* (O Allaah, we ask You to seize them by their throats and we seek refuge with You from their evil)." (Reported by Ahmad and Abu Dawood; see also *Saheeh al-Jaami*, 4582).

It is true that this is a difficult situation. Take the poor girl who has repented, but her former boyfriend calls her on the phone and threatens her by saying: "I have recorded our conversations and I have pictures of you. If you refuse to go out with me I will disgrace you in front of your family." She is certainly in an unenviable position.

Look at the way in which the friends of Shaytaan wage psychological war on those singers and actors, male and female, who have repented. They distribute the worst of their former productions in the marketplace, to put pressure on them. But Allaah is with those who fear Him and those who repent. He is the Friend and Supporter of the believers. He will not abandon or forsake them. Never has anyone sought His protection and been refused. Remember that with hardship there is ease, and after every difficulty comes relief.

The following moving story offers clear testimony in support of what we are saying. This is the story of the great and heroic Sahaabi Marthad ibn Abi Marthad al-Ghanawi, who used to help oppressed Muslims flee from Makkah to Madeenah in secret.

There was a man called Marthad ibn Abi Marthad, who used to smuggle Muslim prisoners-of-war from Makkah to Madeenah. There was a prostitute in Makkah, called 'Anaaq, who had been a friend of Marthad's. Marthad had promised to take one of the prisoners from Makkah to Madeenah. He said: "I came to the shade of one of the gardens of Makkah on a moonlit night, then 'Anaaq came and saw my shadow by the

garden. When she reached me, she recognized me and said: ‘Marthad?’ I said, ‘Marthad.’ She said: ‘Welcome! Come and stay with us tonight.’ I said, ‘O ‘Anaaq, Allaah has forbidden *zinaa* (unlawful sexual relations)’ She called out, ‘O people of the camp! This man is taking your prisoners away!’ Eight men came after me, and I climbed al-Khandamah (a mountain outside one of the entrances to Makkah) and hid in a cave. They came and stood right over me, but Allaah blinded them and they did not see me, so they turned back. I came back to my companion (the prisoner he was planning to take to Madeenah) and picked him up, and he was a heavy man. When we reached al-Udhkhar, I released him from his chains. Then I carried him again and I found the journey difficult. When I reached Madeenah, I came to the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and asked him, ‘O Messenger of Allaah, should I marry ‘Anaaq?’ I asked him twice. The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) remained silent and did not answer me at all, until the aayah ‘*Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an Unbeliever; nor let any but such a man or an Unbeliever marry such a woman; to the Believers such a thing is forbidden’ [al-Noor 24:3 – Yusuf ‘Ali’s translation]* was revealed. Then the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: ‘O Marthad, *Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an Unbeliever; nor let any but such a man or an Unbeliever marry such a woman*, so do not marry her.’”

(*Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, 3/80).

Do you see how Allaah protects those who believe and how He is with those who do good?

But if the worst comes to the worst, and the thing you fear happens – they broadcast bad things about you – what you need to do is to be honest and explain your situation to others. Tell them, “Yes, I was a sinner, but now I have repented to Allaah, so what do you want?”

We should all remember that true disgrace will occur not in this world, but in the Hereafter, on the Day of Judgement, the Day of the Greatest Humiliation, not in front of one or two hundred people, not in front of one or two thousand, but in front of the whole of creation, angels, jinn and mankind, all the people from Adam to the last man.

Let us remember the du’aa’ of Ibraaheem:

“And disgrace me not on the Day when (all the creatures) will be resurrected;

The Day whereon neither wealth nor sons will avail,

Except him who brings to Allaah a clean heart”

[al-Shu’araa’ 26:87-89 – interpretation of the meaning]

At moments of distress, seek help with the du'aa' of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him):

"*Allaahumma ustar 'awraatanaa wa aamin raw'aatanaa. Allaahumma aj'al tha'ranaa 'ala man zalamananaa wa'nsurnaa 'ala man baghiya 'alaynaa. Allaahumma la tushammit binaa'l-a'daa' wa laa'l-haasideen* (O Allaah, cover our faults and calm our fears safe. O Allaah, avenge us over those who have oppressed us, and grant us victory over those who have wronged us. O Allaah, do not cause our enemies or those who envy us to take malicious joy in our misfortune)."

My sins haunt me

You might say: "I committed many sins, and I have repented, but my sins pursue me and I am haunted by what I have done. My memories disturb my sleep and do not let me have any rest. How can I free myself?"

My advice to you is that these feelings are evidence of your sincere repentance. This is essentially remorse, and remorse is repentance. But you can look at your past with hope: the hope that Allaah will forgive you. Do not despair of the mercy of Allaah, for He says (interpretation of the meaning): *"And who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord except those who are astray?" [al-Hijr 15:56]*

Ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: "The gravest of major sins are to associate partners with Allaah, to feel secure against the plan of Allaah and to despair of the mercy of Allaah. (Reported by 'Abd al-Razzaaq and classed as saheeh by al-Haythami and Ibn Katheer).

In the process of moving towards Allaah, the believer is always motivated by both fear of Allaah and hope of His mercy. One or other of them may prevail at times of need. If he sins, the fear of Allaah overwhelms him, and so he repents. When he repents, the hope of Allaah's mercy fills his heart and he seeks the forgiveness of Allaah.

Should I confess?

A person may sorrowfully ask: "I want to repent, but do I have to go and confess the sins I have committed? Is it a condition of repentance that I should tell the *qaadi* (judge) in the court about everything that I have done, and ask him to carry out the appropriate punishment on me? What is the meaning of the story I have just read about the repentance of Maa'iz, of the Ghaamidi woman and of the man who kissed a woman in the garden?"

My response to you is that the slave's direct relationship with Allaah, with no intermediaries, is one of the most important aspects of the belief in Tawheed (Divine

Unity) with which Allaah is pleased. He says (interpretation of the meaning): *"And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me, then (answer them), I am indeed near (to them by My knowledge). I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor)…" [al-Baqarah 2:186]*. If we believe that repentance is only for Allaah, then confession is only for Allaah too. In fact, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to pray in his *du'aa's* asking for forgiveness: "*Aboo'u laka bi na'matika wa aboo'u bi dhanbi* (I acknowledge Your blessings and I acknowledge (i.e. confess) my sin to You)." This is a confession to Allaah.

We are not, by the grace of Allaah, like the Christians, with the priest, the chair of confession, the documents of forgiveness, etc.

Indeed, Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): *"Know they not that Allaah accepts repentance from His slaves…?" [al-Tawbah 9:104]*, i.e., He accepts repentance from His slaves without any mediator or intercessor.

As regards the carrying out of punishments, if the deed has not come to the official attention of the imaam, ruler or qaadi, a person does not have to go to them and confess. If Allaah has covered the sins of a person, there is nothing wrong with him covering his own sins. It is sufficient for him to repent to Allaah, and the matter is between him and his Lord. One of the Names of Allaah is *al-Sitteer*, meaning the One Who covers or conceals (the faults of His slaves), and He likes His slaves to conceal sins too. As far as the Sahaabah such as Maa'iz, the Ghaamidi woman who committed *zinaa*, and the man who kissed the woman in the garden are concerned, all of them did something which they were not obliged to do, may Allaah be pleased with them, because they were so keen to purify themselves. The evidence for this is the fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) turned away from Maa'iz and from the Ghaamidi woman at first. When 'Umar said to the man who had kissed the woman in the garden, "Allaah covered his sin. He should have covered it himself?" the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) remained silent, indicating that he concurred with these words.

So it is not necessary to go to the court and register an official confession, if Allaah has covered one's sins. Nor is it necessary to go to the imaam of a mosque and ask him to carry out the appropriate punishment, or to ask a friend to carry out the punishment of lashing inside the house, as some people imagine.

The following story will teach you how important it is to be careful of the attitude of some ignorant people towards those who repent: a man who wanted to repent went to the ignorant imaam of a mosque, confessed his sins to him and asked him what he should do. The imaam said, "Go to the court and confess your sins officially. They will carry out the appropriate punishment on you. Then we will see what to do next." The poor man saw that he would not be able to do this, so he forgot about repenting and went back to his old ways.

Here I will take the opportunity to add an important comment: knowing about the rules of Islam, and seeking them from the correct sources is a trust. Allaah says (interpretation of the meanings):

"... so ask of those who know the Scripture, if you know not." [al-Nahl 16:43]

"... The Most Beneficent! Ask Him, as He is al-Khabeer (the All-Knower of everything)." [al-Furqaan 25:59]

Not every preacher is qualified to issue fataawaa (rulings or edicts). Not every imaam or muezzin, speaker or storyteller, is qualified to deliver rulings to the people. But the Muslim is responsible for knowing from where he can take rulings. This is an important matter of religion. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) feared what might befall his ummah at the hands of misguided imaams. One of the salaf (early generation of Islam) said: "Knowledge is religion, so pay attention to who it is you are taking your religion from." Beware of these pitfalls, and only consult trustworthy scholars when you are in doubt about an issue. And Allaah is the source of help.

Important fataawaa about repentance

You might say: "I want to repent, but I know nothing about the rulings concerning repentance. I have many questions about how to repent properly from my sins, how to repay the 'debts' I owe to Allaah for the duties towards Him that I have neglected and how to compensate others for the things that I have taken from them or denied them. Is there any answer to all these questions?"

Here are some answers that will quench your thirst for knowledge as you return to Allaah:

Q1: I fall into sin, then I repent, but my human soul which is prone to evil (my *nafs*) gets the better of me and I repeat the sin! Does this mean that my first act of repentance is cancelled out and that I still bear the burden of the earlier sin as well as the later sin?

A1: Most of the scholars say that it is not a condition of valid repentance that the person should never commit the sin again. The conditions of valid repentance are that the person should stop the sinful action immediately, feel sincere remorse for having done it, and be determined not to repeat it. If he does repeat it, he is then like a person who has committed a new sin, for which he must repent anew; his previous repentance, however, is still valid.

Q2: Is repentance from one sin valid when I am still guilty of another?

A2: Yes, repentance from one sin is valid even if you are guilty of another, so long as they are not of the same kind and the second sin is not connected to the first. For example, if a person repents from dealing in *riba* (usury, interest) although he drinks wine, or vice versa, then his repentance is valid, but if he were to repent from dealing in simple interest whilst still dealing in compound interest, then his repentance would not be acceptable. Similarly, if he were to repent from smoking hashish whilst still drinking wine, or vice versa, or he were to repent from committing zinaa with one woman whilst still in a sinful relationship with another, his repentance would be unacceptable. In such cases, all that one is doing is moving from one sin to another within the same category of wrongdoing. (See *al-Madaarij*)

Q3: I have neglected many rights of Allaah in the past, such as prayers, fasting and zakaah. What should I do now?

A3: According to the most correct opinion, the person who has neglected prayers in the past does not have to make them up now, because the time when they were due is now over, and he cannot do anything about it. However, he can compensate for them by sincerely repenting, seeking Allaah's forgiveness and offering as many *naafil* (supererogatory) prayers as he can, so that Allaah may excuse him.

If the person who has neglected fasting was Muslim at the time when the fasts were due, then he has to make them up and, moreover, he has to feed one poor person for each day of Ramadaan that he missed and did not make up before the next Ramadaan came, for no reason. This is the expiation for delay in making up fasts, and it remains as such, even if successive Ramadaans have come and gone.

Example 1: A man neglected to fast on 3 days of Ramadaan in 1400 AH and 5 days of Ramadaan in 1401 AH, out of negligence. Several years later, he repented to Allaah. He must now make up the eight days on which he did not fast, and feed one poor person for each of the eight missed days.

Example 2: A girl reached the age of puberty (i.e., started her periods) in 1400 AH, but felt too embarrassed to tell her family, so she fasted for the eight days, say, of her period, and did not make up those days later. [These fasts are invalid because a menstruating woman is not allowed to fast. Translator]. Subsequently, she repented to Allaah, so now the same ruling applies – she has to make up those days and feed one poor person for each missed day.

It should also be noted here that there is a difference between neglecting prayers and neglecting fasting. There are some scholars who say that the one who deliberately misses a fast with no excuse, cannot make it up later.

The one who has neglected to pay zakaah in the past still has to pay it, because it is both the right of Allaah and the right of the poor.

(For more information, see *Madaarij al-Saalikeen*, 1/383)

Q4: If a sin involves the rights of another person, what form should repentance take?

A4: The governing principle in this case is the hadeeth of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): "Whoever has done wrong to his brother, whether it be the matter of honour or of money, let him put it right today, before he is overtaken by a Day on which there will be no dinar or dirham, but any good deeds he has to his credit may be taken and given in compensation to the one he has wronged, and if he has no good deeds to his credit, his victim's sins may be taken and added to his own burden instead." (Reported by al-Bukhaari).

The only way out for the person who is repenting from such wrongful acts is to give back what he owes to his victims, or to ask for their forgiveness. If they forgive him, then all is well, otherwise he has to pay them back.

Q5: I committed the sin of backbiting about one or more persons, and I slandered others by saying that they had done things of which they were innocent. Do I have to tell them about what I did and ask for their forgiveness? If not, then how do I repent?

A5: This is a matter which requires one to weigh up the pros and cons.

If telling them about the backbiting or slander is not going to make them angry or cause them to hate him, then he should tell them – even if only in general terms – and ask for their forgiveness. He could say "I have wronged you in the past," or "I have spoken unfairly about you, and now I have repented to Allaah, so please forgive me" – without going into details, and this is good enough.

But if telling them about his backbiting or slander is likely to provoke their hatred and anger (which is more likely in most cases), or if general terms will not satisfy them and they will demand more details (which will make them hate him even more) – then he does not have to tell them at all, because Islam does not want to increase wrongdoing. Telling a person who was previously relaxed and happy about something that will make him angry and provoke hatred goes against the aims of sharee'ah, which seeks to open Muslims' hearts towards one another and spread brotherly love among them. Telling a person about one's backbiting may make that person hate him from now on. In such a case it is sufficient just to repent to Allaah, in the following manner:

One should feel remorse, seek Allaah's forgiveness, think about the vileness of this sin, and believe that it is haraam.

He should tell the people to whom he uttered the false words that what he said was not true, and he should clear the name of the person about whom the slander was uttered.

He should speak highly of the person he had slandered, in the same gatherings where the backbiting occurred, and mention his good qualities.

He should defend the person about whom he had gossiped in the past, and speak up for him if anyone tries to speak ill of him.

He should pray for forgiveness for him in his absence.

(*al-Madaarij*, 1/291; *al-Mughni ma'a'l-Sharh al-Kabeer*, 12/78)

We should note here the difference between financial rights and the right to physical safety, on the one hand, and the rights affected by backbiting and slander, on the other. People can benefit from being told about and compensated for their financial rights, and they will be happy, which is why concealing them is not permitted. This is different to the case of offences which concern a man's honour, where disclosing them will only cause more distress and pain.

Q6: How does a murderer repent?

A6: The murderer has violated three rights: the rights of Allaah, the rights of his victim, and the rights of his victim's heirs.

As regards the rights of Allaah, the only way to repay them is to repent.

As regards the rights of his victim's heirs, he has to hand himself over to them so that they may avail themselves of their rights. They have three choices: *qisaas* (retaliation), or *diyah* ("blood money") or they may forgive him.

As regards the rights of the victim, they cannot be compensated in this world. In this case, the scholars say that if the murderer's repentance is sincere, Allaah will absolve him of the obligation to repay his victim, and will Himself compensate the victim on the Day of Resurrection. This is the soundest opinion. (*al-Madaarij*, 1/199).

Q7: How does a thief repent?

A7: If the stolen goods are still in his possession, he should return them to their owners. If he has disposed of them or if their value has declined because of wear and tear or the passage of time, then he should repay their original value, unless the owners are willing to forgive him.

Q8: I feel too ashamed and embarrassed to face the people from whom I stole, and I cannot go and confess to them or ask for their forgiveness. What should I do?

A8: There is no sin on you if you look for a way to avoid the unbearable embarrassment of facing them. You could return their property via a third person, asking him not to mention your name, or you could send it by mail, or you could secretly place

it where they will find it, or you could use an indirect approach, such as saying, "This is what someone owes you." What matters is not naming names, but restoring people's rightful property to them.

Q9: I used to steal from my father's pocket in secret. Now I want to repent, but I do not know exactly how much I stole, and I am too ashamed to face him and tell him.

A9: You should estimate the amount you took to the best of your ability, thinking in terms of more rather than less. There is nothing wrong with returning it as secretly as you took it.

Q10: I stole money from some people, and now I have repented, but I do not know where they live. (Another person might say: I embezzled money from a company which has now closed down, or which has transferred elsewhere", or "I stole from a store which has now changed its location, and I do not know who owns it.")

A10: You have to look for them, as best you can within your means. If you find them, then repay what you owe to them. If the owner has died, then make the repayment to his heirs. If, despite your best efforts, you cannot find them, then give an equal amount in charity on their behalf – even if they are not Muslim, for Allaah will reward them in this world, although there is no reward for disbelievers in the Hereafter.

This matter is like that discussed by Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) in *al-Madaarij* (1/388): a man in the Muslim army stole from the spoils of war. After some time, he repented, and took what he had stolen to the commander of the army, who refused to accept it, saying, "How can I return it to the soldiers when they have dispersed?" So (the man) went to Hajjaaj ibn al-Shaa'ir (to ask for his advice). Hajjaaj said: "Allaah knows the army, He knows their names and the names of their fathers. Pay one-fifth to the rightful owner (i.e., the *bayt al-maal* or treasury of the Islamic state, to which one-fifth of all spoils of war are to be given), and give the rest in charity on their behalf. Allaah will ensure that it reaches them." So the man did as he was advised. When he told Mu'aawiyah (the khaleefah) about it, he said: "If only I had been the one to issue this fatwaa to you, it would be dearer to me than half of what I rule over." Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) issued a similar fatwaa, which is also mentioned in *al-Madaarij*.

Q11: I unlawfully seized some wealth that belonged to orphans, and invested it in trade. This brought a profit which multiplied the original amount several times. But now I have begun to fear Allaah. How can I repent?

A11: The scholars have expressed several opinions on such cases. The most moderate and equitable of them suggests that you should return the original capital to the orphans, along with half of the profits. This will make you and them partners, as it were, in the profit, as well as returning the original amount to them.

This opinion was narrated from Imaam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and was also the view of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, whose student Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) judged it to be the most correct. (*al-Madaarij*, 1/392).

A similar ruling also applies in the case of stolen camels or sheep: if they produce offspring, then the original livestock and half of the young should be given to the rightful owner. If the original livestock has died, then its monetary value and half of the young should be handed over.

Q12: A man was working in an airfreight company which stored different kinds of goods, and he stole a cassette recorder from them. Years later, he repented. Should he return the recorder itself, or should he give them the equivalent monetary value or a similar machine, as the original model is no longer to be found on the market?

A12: He should return the original machine, plus an appropriate amount of money to make up for the depreciation in value caused by the passage of time and wear and tear of use. This should be done in a suitable manner, without causing any harm or trouble for himself. If this is not possible, then he should give an equivalent amount in charity on behalf of the original owner.

Q13: I used to have money that was earned from riba (usury or interest), but I have spent it all and have nothing left. Now I want to repent – what should I do?

A13: All you have to do is repent sincerely to Allaah. Riba is a serious matter, as may be seen from the fact that in the Qur'aan, Allaah did not declare war on anyone except on the people who deal in riba. But since the money that was earned from riba is all gone, you do not have to do anything with regard to it.

Q14: I bought a car with money, some of which was halaal and some was haraam. I still have the car – what should I do now?

A14: If a person buys something that cannot be split up – like a house or a car – with money that is partly halaal and partly haraam, it is sufficient for him to take an amount equivalent to the haraam money from some other wealth that he owns, and pay that in charity, in order to purify the item he owns. If the haraam part of the money is due to other people, he has to pay them the equivalent, according to the guidelines laid out in previous questions.

Q15: What should be done with money earned from selling cigarettes, when it has been mixed or saved with other, halaal, money?

A15: Anyone who trades in haraam things, such as selling musical instruments, haraam tapes and cigarettes, when he knows the ruling concerning them, then repents, should give away the profits he made to a good cause. The object is just to get rid of them; this is not counted as an act of charity as such, because Allaah is good and pure and only accepts what is good and pure.

If this haraam money is mixed with other, halaal, money – as in the case of a storekeeper who sells cigarettes alongside other, permissible goods, then he should calculate the amount to the best of his ability and pay that to a good cause, in the hope of purifying the rest of his wealth. Allaah will compensate him with good, for He is the Most Generous, Most Kind.

Generally speaking, anyone who has wealth earned by haraam means and wants to repent should do the following:

If he was not Muslim at the time when he earned the money, he does not have to dispose of it when he repents, because the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) did not instruct his Companions to dispose of their haraam earnings when they embraced Islam.

If he was Muslim at the time when he earned the haraam money, and knew that it was haraam, then he has to dispose properly of whatever haraam money he has at the time he repents.

Q16: A man used to take bribes, but now Allaah has guided him to the Straight Path. What should he do with the money that he had earned in the form of bribes?

Either of the following will apply in this case:

Either he took bribes from an oppressed person who was forced to pay bribes in order to gain what was rightfully his because he had no other means of getting his rights. In this case, the one who wants to repent should repay the bribe because it is viewed as having been taken by force.

Or he took the bribe from someone who was as guilty of wrongdoing as he was, and who used bribes as a means of obtaining things that were not rightfully his. In this case, the money should not be returned to the one who paid the bribe, but should be disposed of in a good cause, such as giving it to the poor. The one who wants to repent from taking bribes should also repent from the harm he caused by denying people what was rightfully theirs and giving it to those who did not deserve it.

Q17: I used to do haraam things and get paid for them. Now that I have repented, do I have to return this money to the people who paid it to me?

A17: When a person who used to perform haraam services and get paid for them repents, he should dispose of any such earnings that he still has, but he should not return them to the people from whom he took them.

So a prostitute who used to take money for committing zinaa should not give it back to her customers when she repents. The singer who used to accept payment for singing haraam songs should not give the money back to his audience when he repents. The one who used to sell wine or drugs should not give the money back to his customers

when he repents. The one who used to bear false witness in return for payment should not give the money back to those who used his services when he repents – and so on. The reason for this is that if the money is given back to the sinner who paid it, that means that he will have gained both the sin and the haraam money (which increases his chances of committing more haraam deeds). This is the preferred opinion of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah, and it was considered to be the most correct opinion by his student Ibn al-Qayyim. (*al-Madaarij*, 1/390)

Q18: There is another matter that has been worrying me. I committed illegal sexual intercourse with a woman. How do I repent from this sin? Is it permissible for me to marry her in order to cover up the affair?

Another man may say that he committed illegal sexual intercourse while he was overseas, and that the woman became pregnant as a result. Is this his child, and is he obliged to send money to meet the child's expenses?

A18: Questions of this sort have been asked so frequently that it is imperative for all Muslims to pay serious attention to reforming themselves in accordance with the guidance of the Qur'aan and Sunnah. Special attention needs to be paid towards lowering the gaze, avoiding being alone with a member of the opposite sex (*khulwah*), avoiding shaking hands with a woman to whom one is not closely related, adhering to full hijaab, not mixing with the opposite sex, not travelling to non-Muslim countries when there is no need to do so, cultivating Muslim homes and Muslim families, and encouraging early marriage and removing the obstacles that may be preventing it.

As regards the question about the person who committed illegal sexual intercourse, either of the following situations will apply:

Either he had intercourse with her by force (i.e., rape). In this case, he has to pay her an appropriate *mahr* (dowry) as compensation for the harm that he has caused her, and he has to repent sincerely to Allaah. If the matter has come to the attention of the authorities, the appropriate punishment is to be carried out on him. (See *al-Madaarij*, 1/366).

Or he has intercourse with her with her consent. In this case, all that he is required to do is to repent. The child does not take his name and is not regarded as being his at all. He does not have to spend on the child because it is the result of fornication; in this case the child should take the mother's name, not the name of the man who committed fornication.

It is not permitted for a man who is repenting to marry the woman in order to cover up the affair, because Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Let no man guilty of fornication or adultery marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an unbeliever: nor let any but such a man or an unbeliever marry such a woman..." [al-Noor 24:3]

It is not permitted for a man to marry a woman who is pregnant as the result of fornication, even if it is that man's child, or to marry a woman when one does not know if she is pregnant or not.

If he and the woman both repent sincerely, and she is proven not to be pregnant, then it is permissible for him to marry her and start a new life with her which is pleasing to Allaah.

Q19: I committed illegal sexual intercourse with a woman and married her, and we have been together for years. Now we have both repented sincerely to Allaah. What do I have to do in this case?

A19: So long as the repentance is sincere on both your parts, you have to be married anew, fulfilling the shar'i conditions of having a *wali* (guardian of the bride) and two witnesses. This does not have to be done in court; if it is done at home, this is sufficient.

Q20: A woman says that she married a righteous man, but she did things before marriage that were displeasing to Allaah. Now her conscience is troubling her, and she asks whether she has to tell her husband about what she did in the past.

A20: Neither spouse is obliged to tell the other about bad things that they might have done in the past. Anyone who has committed wrongful deeds should conceal them as Allaah has concealed him (or her). Sincere repentance is sufficient.

If a man marries a virgin, but it becomes apparent to him at the time of consummation that she is not in fact a virgin because of an immoral act that she committed in the past, he has the right to take back the mahr (dowry) that he had given her and to divorce her. If, however, he sees that she has repented and that Allaah has covered her sin, and he decides to stay with her, then he will be amply rewarded by Allaah.

Q21: What is required of the man who repents from homosexuality?

A21: Both the one who does this and the one to whom it is done must repent sincerely to Allaah. No worse punishments were sent by Allaah to any people than those sent to the people of Lut, because of the enormity and vileness of their sin. These punishments were:

Their eyesight was taken from them and they were left blind and stumbling, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): *"… So We blinded their eyes…" [al-Qamar 54:37]*.

The *sayhah* (torment, awful cry, thunderous shout) was sent against them.

Their houses were turned upside down.

Stones of baked clay, piled up, were rained down upon them, and they were annihilated.

Therefore the Islamic punishment is that anyone found guilty of this sin (sodomy) is to be killed, whether he is married or unmarried. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever you find committing the sin of the people of Lut, kill them, both the one who does it and the one to whom it is done." (Reported by Abu Dawood, al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Maajah, and classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in *Irwaa' al-Ghaleel*).

Q22: I have repented to Allaah, but I still have some haraam things in my possession, like musical instruments, tapes and movies. Is it permissible for me to sell them, especially since they are worth a lot of money?

A22: It is not permissible to sell haraam items, and the money earned by selling them is also haraam. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "When Allaah forbids a thing, He also forbids its price." (A saheeh hadeeth reported by Abu Dawood). So long as you know that whoever buys these things will use them for haraam purposes, it is not permitted for you to sell them to him, because Allaah has forbidden this in the aayah (interpretation of the meaning): *"...do not help one another in sin and transgression..." [al-Maa'idah 5:2]*. No matter how much worldly wealth you may lose, that which is with Allaah is better and more lasting, and He will compensate you by His grace and favour.

Q23: I used to be a misguided writer, spreading secularist thought through my stories and articles. I used my poetry to spread promiscuity and immorality. Then Allaah turned to me with His mercy and guided me, bringing me out of darkness into light. How should I repent?

A23: This is a great favour and blessing from Allaah. This is guidance for which we praise Allaah. We ask Him to help you to stand firm and to bless you even more.

Anyone who used to use his words and his pen to wage war on Islam by spreading deviant ideologies, misguided innovations (bid'ah), corruption and immorality is obliged to do the following:

He should announce his repentance from everything he has written, and publicly – through all available means – renounce his former misguided writings and refute all his old ideas, so that his new stance will become well-known and no-one will be able to claim that he was misguided by the writings that he has now disowned. This public announcement is one of the obligations of repentance in such cases, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): *"Except those who repent and do righteous deeds, and openly declare (the truth which they concealed). These, I will accept their repentance. And I am the One Who accepts repentance, the Most Merciful." [al-Baqarah 2:160]*

They should use their words and their pens to spread Islam, expending their energy to support the religion of Allaah, teaching the people about the Truth and calling them to it.

They should direct their energies towards counterattacking the enemies of Islam, exposing them and their schemes, and proving their claims wrong, just as he used to support them before. Thus they will become swords in the defence of truth against falsehood. Similarly, anyone who has previously convinced another person – even in a private gathering – of something haraam, such as the idea that riba is not usury as such and is therefore allowed, should go back to that person and explain the truth to him, just as he previously led him astray. In this way he can expiate for his previous sin. And Allaah is the One Who guides.

Conclusion

O slave of Allaah, Allaah has opened the gate of repentance for you, so why not enter it? It was reported that repentance has a gate whose width is like the distance between East and West [according to another report: its width is like the distance travelled in seventy years]. It will not be closed until the sun rises from the West. (Reported by al-Tabaraani in *al-Kabeer*; see *Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 2177).

Listen to the call of Allaah: "O My slaves, you err night and day, but I forgive all sins, so ask Me for forgiveness and I will forgive you." (Reported by Muslim). So why not seek forgiveness?

Allaah stretches forth His hand at night to forgive those who have done wrong during the day, and He stretches forth His hand by day to forgive those who have done wrong during the night. Allaah loves our apologies and pleas, so why not turn to Him?

How beautiful to Allaah are the words of the one who repents: "O Allaah, I ask You by Your power and by my own shame to have mercy on me. I ask You by Your strength and my own weakness, by Your self-sufficiency and my own dependence. To You I submit my lying, sinful forelock. You have many slaves besides me, but I have no Master except You. I have no refuge or escape from You except with You. I beseech you in the manner of a poor and destitute man, I pray to you with the prayer of one who is humble, I call upon you with the supplication of one who is blind and afraid. This is a plea from one whose head is humbled before You, whose nose is in the dust, whose eyes are filled with tears and whose heart has submitted to You."

It was reported that one of the righteous people was passing through the street when he saw an open door out of which came a boy who was crying and weeping, followed by his mother who was pushing him out. She shut the door in his face, and went back inside. The boy went a short distance away, and stood there, thinking, but he could find no other refuge than the house from which he had been expelled and no one else who would care for him as his mother would. Broken hearted, he went back, and found the door still locked. So he lay down on the doorstep and went to sleep, with the tear marks still streaking his face. A little while later, his mother came out. When she saw him in this state, she could not help herself. She embraced him, kissed him and started to weep, saying: "O my son, where did you go? Who would care for you except

me? Didn't I tell you not to disobey me and not to make me punish you, when Allaah has made me merciful and caring towards you?" Then she picked him up and went back inside.

But the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told us: "Allaah is more compassionate towards His slaves than this mother towards her child." (Reported by Muslim).

There is no comparison between a mother's compassion and the Mercy of Allaah, which encompasses everything. Allaah rejoices when His slave repents to Him, and we can never despair of goodness from a Lord who is rejoices. Allaah rejoices more over the repentance of a slave when he repents to Him than a man who was travelling through the wilderness and stopped to camp awhile in an isolated and dangerous place, but he had his camel by his side, with his food and drink loaded on it. He sought out the shade of a tree, where he lay down and went to sleep. When he woke up, his camel had disappeared, so he went looking for it. He came to a hill and climbed it, but he could not see anything. He climbed another hill and looked around, but he could not see anything. When heat and thirst overcame him, he said: "Let me go back to where I was and sleep there until I die." He went back to the tree and lay down in its shade, despairing of ever seeing his camel again. Whilst he was lying there, he opened his eyes, and saw his camel standing next to him, with its halter dangling and his food and drink still loaded on it, so he grabbed hold of its halter. Allaah rejoices even more when the believer repents to Him than this man rejoiced over the return of his camel and his supplies."

(Compiled from saheeh reports; see *Tarteeb Saheeh al-Jaami'*, 4/368)

You should know that sincere repentance brings contrition and humility before Allaah, and the pleading of the one who repents is dearly beloved to the Lord of the Worlds.

The believing slave still remembers his sin, and is filled with sorrow and regret. He follows his error with so many acts of obedience and goodness that Shaytaan may even say, "Would that I had never led him into this sin in the first place!" Thus some of those who repent may become better after repenting than they ever were before.

Allaah will never forsake His slave who turns to Him in repentance.

Imagine a boy living with his father, who gives him the best food and drink, dresses him in the finest clothes, gives him the best possible upbringing, and gives him money to spend. He takes care of all the boy's interests. But one day his father sends him on an errand, and an enemy comes and captures the boy, ties him up and carries him off to enemy territory. Now the way he is treated is the opposite of the kind treatment his father gave him. Whenever he remembers his father's kindness, his heart is filled with anguish and grief because of the blessings that he has lost. It so happens that while he is still a prisoner of the enemy, and about to be executed by them, he suddenly turns towards his father's home, and he sees his father standing nearby. He runs to him and throws himself into his arms, crying "O my father, O my father! Look what has

happened to your son!” with tears streaming down his cheeks. He clings tightly to his father even though the enemy runs after him to snatch him back, and catches up with him.

Do you think the father will give the boy back to the enemy and abandon him? What then do you think of One Who is more merciful towards His slaves than any father or mother towards a child? How do you think Allaah will respond when a slave flees from his enemies and throws himself at His door, rolling in the dust and weeping, saying “O Lord, have mercy upon the one who has no one to show him mercy except You, no supporter except You, no place of refuge except You, no helper except You, one who is poor and in need of You, one who beseeches You. You are his place of refuge, You are his Source of protection. There is no escape or refuge from You except with You…”?

Let us move on, then, to good and righteous deeds, to the company of righteous people, to avoiding deviation after having been guided aright. May Allaah be with you.